

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

ENVIRONMENT BILL

Fourteenth Sitting

Thursday 12 November 2020

(Morning)

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CLAUSE 50 agreed to, with amendments.
SCHEDULE 7 agreed to.
CLAUSE 51 agreed to, with amendments.
SCHEDULE 8 agreed to, with amendments.
CLAUSE 52 agreed to.
SCHEDULE 9 under consideration when the Committee adjourned till this day at Two o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Monday 16 November 2020

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chairs: JAMES GRAY, †SIR GEORGE HOWARTH

† Afolami, Bim (*Hitchin and Harpenden*) (Con)
 Anderson, Fleur (*Putney*) (Lab)
 † Bhatti, Saqib (*Meriden*) (Con)
 † Brock, Deidre (*Edinburgh North and Leith*) (SNP)
 † Browne, Anthony (*South Cambridgeshire*) (Con)
 † Docherty, Leo (*Aldershot*) (Con)
 † Furniss, Gill (*Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough*) (Lab)
 † Graham, Richard (*Gloucester*) (Con)
 Jones, Fay (*Brecon and Radnorshire*) (Con)
 † Jones, Ruth (*Newport West*) (Lab)

Longhi, Marco (*Dudley North*) (Con)
 † Mackrory, Cherilyn (*Truro and Falmouth*) (Con)
 † Moore, Robbie (*Keighley*) (Con)
 † Pow, Rebecca (*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*)
 † Thomson, Richard (*Gordon*) (SNP)
 † Whitehead, Dr Alan (*Southampton, Test*) (Lab)
 † Zeichner, Daniel (*Cambridge*) (Lab)

Anwen Rees, Sarah Ioannou, *Committee Clerks*

† **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Thursday 12 November 2020

(Morning)

[SIR GEORGE HOWARTH *in the Chair*]

Environment Bill

11.30 am

The Chair: Before we begin, I remind Members about social distancing. Spaces available to Members are clearly marked. *Hansard* colleagues will be grateful if you could send any speaking notes to hansardnotes@parliament.uk. I also remind Members, please, to switch electronic devices off or to silent. Teas and coffees are not allowed during sittings.

We will now continue with line-by-line consideration of the Bill. The selection list for today's sitting is available in the room. It shows how the selected amendments have been grouped together for debate. Amendments grouped together are generally on the same or a similar issue. Please note that decisions on amendments do not take place in the order that they are debated, but in the order that they appear on the amendment paper. The selection and grouping list shows the order of debates. Decisions on each amendment are taken when we come to the clause to which the amendment relates.

Clause 50

RESOURCE EFFICIENCY REQUIREMENTS

Amendments made: 39, in clause 50, page 30, line 20, leave out "the National Assembly for Wales" and insert "Senedd Cymru".

See Amendment 28.

Amendment 40, in clause 50, page 30, line 21, leave out "Assembly" and insert "Senedd".—(*Rebecca Pow.*)

See Amendment 28.

Clause 50, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 7

RESOURCE EFFICIENCY REQUIREMENTS

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): I beg to move amendment 19 in schedule 7, page 165, line 30, leave out "may" and insert "must".

It is a pleasure to see you back in the Chair, Sir George, and to serve under your chairmanship. The amendment is in the names of my hon. Friends the Members for Southampton, Test, for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare), for Cambridge and, my neighbour back home, for Newport East (Jessica Morden).

The schedule gives the relevant national authority the power to make the regulations that set the resource efficiency requirements that products are required to meet.

As a Member representing a Welsh constituency, it is a real pleasure to be able to speak to a part of the Bill that applies to all parts of the UK—to all countries. Once again, it is appropriate to remind colleagues that the Bill is important for all our futures. That is why we need to ensure that it is fit for purpose and effective in its measure and scope.

Our amendment to schedule 7 once again looks to the power of language and the subsequent ambition and drive of the Minister and her colleagues. I have never doubted her willingness or commitment to action, but that is why we wanted the Bill to come back sooner, so that all Members could give it the attention and focus that it deserves. For all the commitment and focus, however, we need to see results and actions, not just empty rhetoric that lands up simply being nothing more than words. That is why the amendment proposes to leave out "may" and to insert "must".

All those of us privileged to be elected to this House, from all parts of the country, come with the support of our constituents behind us. We also come with our party political views and commitments, too. Those views and commitments will, as we all know, change depending on the contemporary political issues of the day, which is why it is so important that we get the wording of the Bill correct now, to ensure that what we mean is enshrined in law for, and clearly understood by, future generations.

The schedule is applicable to all parts of the United Kingdom, so it is vital that we make it as strong as possible. We do not need any more "mays"; we need more "musts". Language, as has been said in previous sittings, is something that we need to get right. We need to ensure that the language used in the final iteration of the Bill is as strong and ambitious as it can be. As this part of the Bill looks at the general powers exercised, we need to ensure that the relevant authorities are empowered to do what is necessary, and are obligated to do so. The amendment will help to do that, and I hope that the Minister will take it in the spirit in which it is intended.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. I thank the hon. Member for the amendment. As with amendment 18 on the resource efficiency information power, it is not appropriate to have a duty to take action on all products or to specify particular products in advance. Our intention is to use the power to set resource efficiency eco-design requirements for products where the greatest benefit can be realised. As I did in respect of amendment 18, I reassure the hon. Member that we are committed to approaching the making of any regulations in that way.

It is really important that we have flexibility on setting standards on products that come to light as critical. It is not possible right now to identify products in advance, as it very much depends on industry practice, the environmental impact that the particular group of products being considered might have on the environment, and the feasibility of setting minimum eco-design requirements.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to continue with you in the Chair, Sir George. The Minister is making a fine speech, but on all the "may" and "must" issues I find myself casting my mind back to children on the streets on Fridays, as they left their

schools, to demand climate justice, and huge numbers of people expressing concern about the urgency of it. Would she really feel comfortable standing in front of those groups of people and dithering in this way on issues that need to be dealt with urgently?

Rebecca Pow: I thank the hon. Member for his slightly cheeky intervention. We are talking about the Environment Bill. I have outlined the difference between “may” and “must” in great detail. Importantly, we are not stopping it happening, but it has to happen in the right way and on the right products. A great deal of stakeholder engagement has already happened with industry and will continue, because industry has to be able to do such things, and we have to bring industry along with us.

I will give a good example of where we might soon need to use the measures. Evidence has suggested that absorbent hygiene products might be a good place to start. Similarly, we have identified some other waste streams. The powers might be useful on textiles, furniture, electronics and construction materials, so the provision will genuinely be used and it will genuinely be useful.

I believe that the prioritisation approach will also provide sufficient flexibility to implement or modify requirements at different times for different products, and within a reasonable time span. It will also facilitate the making of separate provisions for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, should the devolved Administrations wish to exercise the powers, as the hon. Member for Newport West recognised. For those reasons, I believe it is appropriate to take regulation-making powers, rather than a duty on the Government to set standards, and I therefore ask her to kindly withdraw the amendment.

Ruth Jones: I thank the Minister for her comments. I think she has made the case for me, because I would hope that the devolved Administrations would insist on taking up the powers. The schedule addresses future circumstances very well with the word “specified”. It is future-proofing the Bill, but the word “must” strengthens it at the beginning. That is why we are pushing for it.

We will not divide the Committee on this matter today; we are content that the wording has been recorded in *Hansard*. But it is really important that we strengthen the Bill and make sure that people can take the powers when they should do so. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Ruth Jones: I beg to move amendment 162, in schedule 7, page 165, line 35, leave out sub-sub-paragraph (a).

As with a number of other important amendments, I move the amendment in the names of my hon. Friends the Members for Southampton, Test, for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), for Bristol West (Thangam Debonnaire), for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare), for Cambridge and, my constituency neighbour back home, for Newport East (Jessica Morden)—that was a memory test.

As Government and Labour colleagues will know from their preparation for this sitting of the Committee, this is very much a technical amendment. Having done that reading, I know that all Members will agree that amendment 162 essentially speaks for itself. [*Laughter.*]

As a consequence, I will not detain the Committee for longer than is necessary, but I will touch on a couple of important points.

First, our amendment proposes to remove sub-sub-paragraph (a). We tabled the amendment because Labour Members are conscious of the need to use the Bill both now and in the future. We do not want to reduce the scope and reach of the Bill before we know where the challenges facing our environment are, what action may be required and when. Once again, I reiterate the point about language: it is vital that every word, every full stop and every sub-sub-paragraph enhances our ability to protect the natural world and preserve our environment. This amendment will help to do that and I hope that the Minister will accept it in the spirit that is intended.

Rebecca Pow: Again, I thank the hon. Member for tabling the amendment, but I also reassure her that the Government recognise the importance of measures to improve the durability, repairability and recyclability of both energy-related products and products that are not energy-related. The amendment is therefore not necessary, because at the end of the transition period the Government will have powers to set resource-efficiency requirements for energy-related products under the Ecodesign for Energy-Related Products Regulations 2010. Also, DEFRA is working closely with the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in this regard.

In combination with the information power detailed in schedule 6, we could, for example, require that information be provided with electronic devices explaining their expected lifetime, and how to carry out repairs or upgrades. The retained eco-design legislation could be used in tandem to set requirements for the availability of spare parts and upgradeable design.

Lots of us who have our own washing machines, dishwashers and all of those sorts of equipment would probably be pretty much in favour of some of those ideas, so having two sets of powers covering resource efficiency for the same products risks being confusing for businesses and other stakeholders. Therefore, I ask that the hon. Member withdraw her amendment.

Ruth Jones: I thank the Minister for her words there, including her explanation, and also for setting out the scenarios that could be useful in the future. It is always useful to have practical examples to be able to think about how these measures will be applied in the future.

Obviously, while we are sad that the Minister is not going to take our amendment on board, we nevertheless now have it on the record. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Ruth Jones: I beg to move amendment 163, in schedule 7, page 166, line 13, at end insert

“taking into account social dimensions such as human rights, public health and fair working conditions”.

The Chair: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment 164, in schedule 7, page 166, line 26, leave out lines 28 to 32 and insert—

“(b) the techniques and working conditions used in its manufacture and sourcing of resources;

- (c) the resources consumed during its production or use;
- (d) the pollutants (including greenhouse gases within the meaning of section 92 of the Climate Change Act 2008) released or emitted at any stage of the product's production, use or disposal; with consideration of the social impacts these may result in, for example, public health concerns."

Amendment 165, in schedule 7, page 167, line 22, after "environment" insert "workers or communities".

Amendment 166, in schedule 7, page 167, line 25, after "environment" insert "workers or communities".

Amendment 167, in schedule 7, page 167, line 29, after "environment" insert "workers or communities".

Ruth Jones: This amendment has also been tabled in the names of the hon. Members I mentioned in relation to the previous two amendments.

Amendment 163 looks at the wider impact of how things are done, so it is not just a case of looking solely at what is produced and manufactured and its impact on the environment. It looks at the full package, which is why it seeks to insert into schedule 7

"taking into account social dimensions such as human rights, public health and fair working conditions".

11.45 am

We all know from our constituency work the importance of all three of these social dimensions to workers and producers, and also to consumers. Certainly, my mailbag is full of people who want to do the right thing. As we said before, David Attenborough's "Blue Planet" has raised awareness and consciousness among people out there who want to do the right thing. I get many emails from constituents asking how best to do the right thing, and they certainly want to take into account human rights, public health and fair working conditions. We see that in people using reusable coffee cups—obviously until the covid pandemic came in—and in campaigns for the real living wage and other important protections for working people.

As we seek to deliver this once-in-a-lifetime legislation, we need to make sure that all our bases are covered and that the impacts of the decisions we take are factored in and covered in detail. The amendment would allow Ministers to demonstrate their commitment to this once-in-a-lifetime legislation actually delivering change, and it would allow colleagues across the House to show that we will put our money and our legislation where our mouths are.

Rebecca Pow: I thank the hon. Lady for tabling these amendments. I share her view that human rights, working conditions, public health and the impact of product manufacture, use and disposal on workers and wider communities—I think those are the things that she was getting at—are of the utmost importance. However, the primary focus of the Bill, and the resource efficiency powers that we are currently debating, is improving the natural environment. That will benefit workers and communities who depend on their natural environment for clean air, clean water and a stable climate, as well as improving the durability and reparability of products so that they last longer and provide better value. Going beyond matters of the environment to incorporate social factors—such as labour conditions, as the amendments suggest—and other benefits to communities would be going beyond the scope of this legislative instrument.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the suggested amendment looks like a cocktail of impractical virtue signalling?

Rebecca Pow: I thank my hon. Friend for that incredibly concise intervention. Indeed, the amendment is not necessary, which is the point I am trying to make and what I think he is getting at, because it would be really complicated, if not impossible, to lay down requirements on a product basis that cover these considerations for all exporting countries. Some difference in standards is obviously inevitable, and because of this complexity, such matters are much better dealt with—as I think my hon. Friend is getting at—by other legal mechanisms. That is the remit of the International Labour Organisation's conventions.

Amendment 164 would remove reference to the material composition of products. This wording is essential to the objectives of the power, as the materials in a product will determine how easily the product can be taken apart, recycled and manufactured. Material composition may also determine the amount of pollution associated with these activities.

Finally, I must emphasise the importance of having a carefully defined power within the scope of the Bill. The detriment of seeking to cover too many considerations within these provisions is the risk of making it overly complicated to actually use the powers. On those grounds, I ask the hon. Lady if she will kindly withdraw her amendment.

Ruth Jones: I am glad that the Minister shares our concerns about human rights, public health and fair working conditions. As the hon. Member for Gloucester said, it is a cocktail, but to be honest it is a good cocktail, and it is useful, and it will actually assist us as we go forward with this Bill. It will enhance the Bill, because we think that the Bill should cover these important aspects.

Rebecca Pow: May I very quickly intervene on the hon. Lady, if that is all right, Mr Chairman?

The Chair: Provided that the hon. Member is prepared to accept the intervention, yes, it is all right.

Rebecca Pow: I want to highlight that we do not consider that goals such as labour rights are best delivered through setting requirements relating to product standards and information. To add to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester, action is already under way on those fronts through a number of other routes, including the Modern Slavery Act 2015, which requires corporate reporting on supply chains and multi-stakeholder working groups and encourages companies to sign up to the International Labour Organisation's call for action, which I referred to before.

Ruth Jones: I am grateful to the Minister for augmenting her comments. I agree it is good that we have the Modern Slavery Act and that is important, but there is no harm in putting an additional belt and braces on this Bill to ensure that human rights are taken into consideration, as are public health and fair working conditions. We have pushed for the minimum wage and the living wage, and it is important that those things are taken into consideration. There is no harm in our having integrated objectives across a number of Bills, because it shows that the Government are joined up and thinking across

the piece. That is why we will push this amendment to a Division, because it is such an important one and we think it should be enshrined in law.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 7.

Division No. 23]

AYES

Furniss, Gill	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Jones, Ruth	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Bhatti, Saqib	Mackrory, Cherilyn
Browne, Anthony	Moore, Robbie
Docherty, Leo	Pow, Rebecca
Graham, Richard	

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment proposed: 164, in schedule 7, page 166, line 26, leave out lines 28 to 32 and insert—

- “(b) the techniques and working conditions used in its manufacture and sourcing of resources;
- (c) the resources consumed during its production or use;
- (d) the pollutants (including greenhouse gases within the meaning of section 92 of the Climate Change Act 2008) released or emitted at any stage of the product’s production, use or disposal; with consideration of the social impacts these may result in, for example, public health concerns.”—(*Ruth Jones.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 7.

Division No. 24]

AYES

Furniss, Gill	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Jones, Ruth	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Bhatti, Saqib	Mackrory, Cherilyn
Browne, Anthony	Moore, Robbie
Docherty, Leo	Pow, Rebecca
Graham, Richard	

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment proposed: 165, in schedule 7, page 167, line 22, after “environment” insert “workers or communities”.—(*Ruth Jones.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 7.

Division No. 25]

AYES

Furniss, Gill	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Jones, Ruth	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Bhatti, Saqib	Mackrory, Cherilyn
Browne, Anthony	Moore, Robbie
Docherty, Leo	Pow, Rebecca
Graham, Richard	

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment proposed: 166, in schedule 7, page 167, line 25 after “environment” insert “workers or communities”.—(*Ruth Jones.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 7.

Division No. 26]

AYES

Furniss, Gill	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Jones, Ruth	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Bhatti, Saqib	Mackrory, Cherilyn
Browne, Anthony	Moore, Robbie
Docherty, Leo	Pow, Rebecca
Graham, Richard	

Question accordingly negated.

Question proposed, That the schedule be the Seventh schedule to the Bill.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I have a few things to say about the schedule, including some questions for the Minister about how it might best be implemented.

As I am sure all hon. Members know, how waste becomes a resource is set out substantially in the 2008 EU waste framework directive, which gives guidance to member states—to be placed into law—about how that process should be carried out. The Committee will also be aware that resource efficiency is a very real issue.

A big question is precisely when something in a stream should be defined as waste or as a resource. The waste framework directive contains a number of criteria about that end-of-waste transition, but the framework and the subsequent UK legislation have been fraught with difficulties and problems, because they have required waste to be categorised: as hazardous waste, as inert waste—waste that can be put in golf courses and so on—or as waste that must undergo various treatments, for example. The waste hierarchy, which the Committee has discussed, derives from a number of considerations not only about what waste is, but about what should be done with various waste streams.

12 noon

A problem arising from that is that quite often a waste stream entering the various processing, sorting and recycling arrangements carries a classification of what it consists of. There are circumstances where a particular waste stream is plainly potentially usable for another purpose, but because it is classified in a particular way going through the process, there are all sorts of complications about how it should be treated, making it virtually impossible to transfer it to a resource stream. The point at which waste becomes a resource is very important. Indeed, frequently in this country the complications surrounding the treatment, arrangements and the direction of waste mean it is far less likely than it might otherwise be that someone will come along and say, “That’s a resource we would like to take up. We can use it as a resource for our processes subsequently.”

Ruth Jones: My hon. Friend is making a powerful point. Would he agree that a good example of this is the supermarkets? In the past, food that had gone beyond

[*Ruth Jones*]

its use-by date went to waste, but nowadays, thanks to important communication between supermarkets and homeless people, for example, the latter can utilise this food for their evening meals. One man's waste is another man's supper.

Dr Whitehead: My hon. Friend is right. We have made considerable progress on food waste, and we will come to discuss some wider aspects of food waste later in the proceedings. Nevertheless, she rightly states the principle: if a piece of waste which would otherwise be taken out and processed in certain ways is stewarded through that process, knowing that the outcome of that process is a good outcome, that process can be much more easily streamlined to ensure that what was waste becomes a resource.

For years, the Environment Agency has been trying to tackle the many instances where something that goes into a waste stream, such as bones residual to animal rendering, carcasses and various other things, may well be treated as hazardous and have particular measures apply to them. However, if those bones can be transferred for the making of bone china, that industry can take the bones and steward them through the process of becoming a resource for undertaking what the industry wants to do. That allows what looked like a problem to become a solution. That is just one example—perhaps, not a terribly good example—but there are many examples of that in industry, where one industry's waste, which may be classified in particular ways, is desperately needed as a resource for another industry, which cannot unlock that resource from it being waste. We have never properly gotten to grips with that in this country.

The concept of stewardship, whereby what is a piece of waste can be certified as being stewarded, ready for the purpose of becoming a resource, has never properly been defined in regulations or in law. Hence, often by the time we have gotten around to thinking that something is a particular resource, it has already been disposed of down a particular waste stream and is lost for that resource purpose.

Daniel Zeichner: As ever, my hon. Friend is making a thoughtful and interesting speech. As he spoke, I thought of some of the examples that came up in the covid-19 crisis in the food chains, where we were at risk because one part of the system relied on another in exactly the ways he is describing. What struck me is that the economies of scale are critical. Are we not much better being part of a wider, bigger system that allows us to use things that are potentially regarded as waste? With a small, narrow system, they cannot be reused, but they can be if we are part of a bigger system.

Dr Whitehead: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The concept of a larger system through which all of this works is key to this whole discussion. Indeed, what we have been talking about, and what the waste strategy document says about the circular economy, means that putting this into a wider frame of how we circulate products through the economy, so that we do not pull virgin materials in and that everything we are using as it goes through the economy is reusable, recyclable or replaceable in one way or another, is essential to a resource-efficient and low-carbon waste and resource economy.

In this part of the Bill, we are essentially replacing elements of the waste framework directive with UK law, but does not seem to me that what we have done allows the sort of processes that I have described to be properly incorporated in regulations so that the circular economy arrangement can be expedited. Does the Minister consider that the regulations that will be associated with schedule 7 are capable of allowing those sorts of changes to be made, to the benefit of the recycled and reclaimed resources industry in the UK; or does she consider that we have missed an opportunity here, and that further legislation and/or regulations may be necessary to ensure that that can be done?

Rebecca Pow: I thank the hon. Member for Southampton, Test for his thoughts. I shall stick to the detail of what the schedule is actually about in my answers, but I want to touch on his general points. Of course, the whole purpose of the waste and resources section of the Bill is to reduce all waste with a range of measures, and to make everything we produce recyclable, repairable and more durable. That is why we are focusing particularly on eco-design.

The hon. Gentleman touched on some issues relating to bones and various things like that. This is a slightly more general comment, but there are many health-related issues that would have to be taken into account. It takes me back to the time of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, when any food waste was banned from being fed to pigs. There were masses of knock-on effects, but as a pig keeper, I was mortified about that. He will know that such things are complicated, so one cannot go down that burrow without discussing a lot of other issues.

I want to get back to the purposes of the schedule, but I will touch on the point made by the hon. Member for Newport West about food waste. I am sure she is pleased that food waste is dealt with in the Bill—that is one of the really positive and exciting things about it. Food waste will now have to be collected from local authorities in the waste collections. Some local authorities already do it, but every one will have to do it. Clause 47 and schedule 4 will require producers that are responsible for food surplus and food waste to take action, and that includes redistributing it. Great work is already done by many people, but that will be a requirement for surplus food.

On the schedule, by applying the principle of eco-design to non-energy-related products, we can drive up resource efficiency by gradually removing the least resource efficient products from the market. That is the very point that the hon. Lady was getting at. Those requirements might relate to durability, recyclability, repairability or the sustainability of products for dismantling and remanufacture. I think the hon. Member for Southampton, Test was getting at that point; products can be taken apart and then the component parts could be reused.

The requirements might also concern the material composition of products and the way in which products are manufactured, and the pollutants emitted or produced by products throughout the full lifecycle. For example—the hon. Member for Newport West said she likes examples—that might include moving and load-bearing parts such as wheels and hinges from items of furniture, because they might wear out first. Making them removable and replaceable could be part of the design. Where that is not the case, the regulations might require that parts

can be removed without damage to the rest of the product, and other wheels can be screwed back on, for example. That is the kind of thing we are discussing.

As has been explained in relation to the resource efficiency information power, we have identified priority areas for action, including clothing, furniture and electronic equipment, where we believe requirements such as this are likely to have the greatest impact.

Dr Whitehead *rose*—

Rebecca Pow: I am about to conclude, but I see that the hon. Gentleman is trying to intervene.

Dr Whitehead: I thank the Minister for giving way. I am not particularly criticising or wishing to take away from any of the excellent things the Minister has been saying about the purpose of these provisions. What I am trying to get at is what actually happens now—the way in which things are classified while they are going through the waste stream and before they turn into a resource, and the extent to which the classification under existing legislation hinders the process by which they may be liberated as a resource in exactly the way the Minister has described in her comments. That is what I am concerned about—whether those classifications can be substituted by a system of stewardship, which would enable that passage to be much more straightforward, good intentions notwithstanding concerning how that passage can result in a successful outcome.

Rebecca Pow: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but I think he is overcomplicating the issue. Through the measures in the Bill, every single person who makes something will have to think about what it contains, what it is made of, what is going to happen to it, where it is going to go, who is going to reuse it and how long it will last. I think the issues he is worried about will solve themselves, in a way. If he wants more detail on that, I am sure we can write to him.

Daniel Zeichner: Will the Minister give way?

Rebecca Pow: I am going to plough on. The schedule considers eco-design. Clauses 49 and 50 and schedules 6 and 7 describe resource efficiency powers, which complement various other powers in the Bill, including the extended producer responsibility—that very much touches on what I have just said. They aim, as a minimum, to ensure that we can be ahead of the curve internationally and, ideally, to enable us to lead the way. Acquiring resource efficiency powers is an essential step towards delivering against the goals of the 25-year environment plan and the resources and waste strategy, and achieving net zero by 2050. I believe that all the things in the schedule will help that work.

We are ahead of the curve even compared with the EU on this matter. Once we have acquired the powers, it will be possible to set requirements for all products, whether they are energy related or not. That is not yet possible for the EU. At present, its eco legislation extends only to energy-related products. On those grounds alone, we are ahead, which I hope my hon. Friends and hon. Members will be pleased about.

Question put and agreed to.

Schedule 7 accordingly agreed to.

Clause 51

DEPOSIT SCHEMES

12.15 pm

Amendments made: 41, in clause 51, page 31, line 3, leave out “the National Assembly for Wales” and insert “Senedd Cymru”.

See Amendment 28.

Amendment 42, in clause 51, page 31, line 4, leave out “Assembly” and insert “Senedd”.—(*Rebecca Pow.*)

See Amendment 28.

Clause 51, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 8

DEPOSIT SCHEMES

Ruth Jones: I beg to move amendment 20 in schedule 8, page 170, line 9, leave out “may” and insert “must”.

The amendment appears in my name and those of my hon. Friends. The schedule seeks to enable the national authority, namely the Secretary of State in relation to England, Ministers in the Welsh Government and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland to make regulations establishing deposit schemes.

I thank those out there in the real world who are working on these important issues. For example, Greener UK is working tremendously hard to ensure that the Bill is fit for purpose. I hope that Ministers will take the same approach.

With the powers in place, it will be imperative that the Government promise to deliver the model that will best achieve their aims, as detailed in the resources and waste strategy. Those include changing behaviour to reduce littering on land, in rivers and at sea, and to improve recycling rates. Members of the Committee will remember—I only just remember—the pop bottle schemes, when people would go around with bottles and get 5p. For young people, it was a useful income—for those of us old enough to remember.

All-in deposit schemes—by that, I mean drinks containers of all sizes and materials—offer the best financial return. They achieve the best recycling return, and constitute the clearest system for the public to use. That was confirmed by a series of impact assessments undertaken by the Government in 2019, which found that an all-in deposit return scheme would offer substantial financial benefit and collect a greater proportion of containers when compared with a more limited system that only covered so-called “on the go” drinks containers. An all-in scheme is the most likely to offer opportunities for scaling up to a refill system in future.

Further to that, an all-in deposit return scheme would ensure compatibility right across the UK, by setting out a system for England that would work in harmony with Scotland's plans. We all have our views on whether the Government are committed to the Union, but as a Welsh MP the lack of respect for devolution and the devolved Government in Wales in recent months has been a matter of huge concern to me and many of my constituents. If the Government are to show that they are serious, they need to show it in letter as well as in voice.

[Ruth Jones]

The amendment would allow the Government to do just that. A system that works for and with all nations of the UK would especially benefit those who live near the border between, say, England and Scotland and anyone travelling between the two nations. My Scottish colleagues have highlighted the matter in the House on previous occasions. We want to ensure that the systems are compatible, if not all encompassing, while ensuring that they do not undermine one another financially or environmentally. Likewise, that approach would facilitate a simple roll-out to Wales and Northern Ireland, and so would be a win-win for us all.

The Bill only states that the Secretary of State “may” establish a scheme. The amendment would ensure that the Secretary of State, whoever he or she might be, would actually deliver. Our amendment follows many others tabled to the Bill and moved in Committee. It is all about delivery, action and getting it right by writing it into the Bill.

Rebecca Pow: I thank the hon. Lady for her amendment. We obviously recognise the importance of reducing littering and increasing recycling rates as part of our commitment to leave the environment in a better state for the next generation. Our 2019 manifesto pledged to introduce a deposit return scheme to incentivise people to recycle plastic and glass.

This power we enable us to establish deposit return schemes for different items, particularly those which are littered—it is important to try to cut those down—where we want to increase recycling, as well as the quality and value of recycled material. That is all part of that drive that this section is about.

A deposit return scheme will allow us to take plastic from drinks bottles and ensure it gets recycled back into a new bottle, reducing our reliance on virgin plastic material. We touched on that yesterday. So many companies would like a regular, consistent supply of the right kind of plastic to turn into other bottles. We are working on developing an evidence base that will include further consultation before finalising the design and scope of a DRS for drinks containers that will be set down in regulations made using this power.

We know that UK consumers go through a shocking 14 billion plastic drinks bottles, 9 billion drinks cans and 5 billion glass bottles a year. Although plastic bottles are fully recyclable, recent packaging recycling rates of 65% demonstrates that there is room for improvement. We consider that a well-designed deposit return scheme for drinks and containers could achieve something like 90% and higher, as countries that have already introduced the scheme are achieving.

This power gives the relevant national authority the flexibility to make regulations to establish deposit return schemes in relation to specific products or materials. It also gives the flexibility to decide which items are to be included in the DRS, to secure an increase in recycling and reuse of materials and to reduce the incidence of littering and fly-tipping.

It is entirely appropriate to be flexible here. It would not be appropriate for this power to be exercised in some circumstances. The discretionary element allows it to be used in a targeted manner for things that are, for example, the most littered items, such as drinks containers,

that are often consumed away from the home. This comes out as one of the top lists on the “Keep Britain Tidy” surveys that are constantly conducted.

We need to have a system that allows us to add and adjust as we learn more about how a deposit return scheme works in practice. I have talked to lots of people involved in these types of schemes. Getting the system right is crucial. I ask the hon. Lady, therefore, to withdraw her amendment.

Ruth Jones: I thank the Minister for her comments. I am slightly anxious that she is talking about further consultation here, because the public just want us to get on with this. They are fed up with being consulted. They have given their views and they want it to happen now. As Greta Thunberg and all the young people, certainly in my constituency, are telling me, “Get on with it. We cannot afford to wait for you. This planet has to be there for us tomorrow.”

Daniel Zeichner: That is exactly the point. I was tempted to intervene on the Minister, but she seemed reluctant. The call from people out there is that this needs to be got on with. I do not understand why the Government persistently delay. There is a danger that the Government could be accused of virtue signalling.

Ruth Jones: That is an interesting point. As my hon. Friend said, if the Government are serious about this, they need to get on with it and they need to be seen to be getting on with it.

Rebecca Pow: The hon. Member for Cambridge has fired me up now. The point is that this scheme must also fit with other schemes, so it also must fit with the consistent collection of items by the local authorities. A great deal of work must be done to ensure that they all fit together. Even the hon. Member for Cambridge mentioned that one system must not undermine another; they must fit together. If we could get consistent systems across all the devolved Administrations, that would be useful. We are watching Scotland closely, because it is a little bit ahead, to see how that works. It is important that we bring all those things together.

Ruth Jones: Yes, of course we agree with her that these things have to be communicated clearly. We need to make sure that no one scheme undermines another. We do not want people crossing borders with lorryloads of plastic waste or whatever. That is not the intention. We understand that. However, it is important that we have clear communication across all four nations to make sure that that does not happen. The Minister outlined the regulations that will come through—

Rebecca Pow: I am sure the hon. Lady will agree and applaud the fact that we consulted closely with the Welsh Assembly Government, and on behalf of Northern Ireland. We are working closely with them on the proposals on exactly the grounds that she proposes.

Ruth Jones: I agree that it is important that we continue to make that point and communicate clearly across all four nations, but the Minister mentioned further regulations down the line. How will those be

enforced? We want to know the how, the what and the where. How will it all come together? I am still not clear on exactly what will happen, so perhaps in future debates the Minister will outline those regulations.

The Minister talked about flexibility. Again, I hark back to my physiotherapy days: we do not want to be so flexible that we fall over. We need some constraints and guidelines to help us to walk in the right path. We are all in favour of getting this done. It is just a question of how soon, how quickly and how best we can do it. With that, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Rebecca Pow: I beg to move amendment 68, in schedule 8, page 172, line 39, leave out from “scheme” to end of line 40 and insert

“in relation to which the Scottish deposit administrator is exercising functions”.

This amendment modifies the way in which the scheme administrator of a Scottish deposit and return scheme is described, by referring to the administrator “exercising functions” rather than being “designated”. This is consistent with the terminology used in the relevant Scottish legislation. A similar change is made by Amendment 69.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments 69 and 70.

Rebecca Pow: Amendments 68 to 70 seek to correct a technical error concerning a reference to how a scheme administrator would be established in Scotland. The amendment will enable a scheme administrator to interact, engage and make payments to a scheme administrator established through a deposit and return scheme in Scotland. It was always our intention for schemes within the UK to be able to work together, as I have already highlighted, including being able to make payments between schemes. I think the hon. Member for Newport West asked about that. The measure will help ensure that schemes are easier for consumers to use, will help to reduce the risk of fraud between schemes, and provide coherence for producers and retailers. I hope the Committee will agree to the amendment.

Amendment 68 agreed to.

Amendments made: 69, in schedule 8, page 174, line 20, leave out from “person” to end of line 22 and insert

“exercising the functions of a scheme administrator in relation to a Scottish deposit and return scheme”.

See Amendment 68.

Amendment 70, in schedule 8, page 174, line 24, leave out “that Act” and insert

“the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 (asp 12)”—(*Rebecca Pow.*)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 69 and inserts the full name of the Act being referred to.

Question proposed, That the schedule, as amended, be the Eighth schedule to the Bill.

Dr Whitehead: I welcome the opportunity to have a brief debate on the schedule, which is all about deposit schemes. As the Minister has set out admirably, the deposit schemes can target things that cause particular problems, including litter, fly-tipping and various other activities. I want to ask the Minister what the deposit schemes might consist of and the extent to which the schedule would facilitate that extent being realised.

When talking about deposit schemes, we usually think about precisely the sort of things that my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge talked about, with memories of kids hanging around lidos and swimming pools, nicking Coke and pop bottles from sunbathers to take them back to the shop and get thruppence on them—not that I did that, obviously.

12.30 pm

Daniel Zeichner: Of course not.

Rebecca Pow: That is how his early interest in waste started.

The Chair: Order. There is too much muttering.

Dr Whitehead: What occurred then, and what is occurring now—or what I hope will occur now—is that the motivation to recycle, return and sort out particular items comes from a value being given to the residual function of those items after their primary function has been carried out. In the previous example, the Coke bottle has been emptied, but it still has value because the child can get some money by returning it to the shop.

We have seen that process in operation in various parts of Europe. In France, a number of supermarkets have reverse vending machines, where bottles can be inserted into the machine in exchange for a credit. The value has been secured and the product has been safely restored for recycling. The consequence of a lack of such schemes is that people dump things in the street or, in more serious instances, engage in serious fly-tipping.

On deposit schemes for larger items, some really large items have effectively got themselves into that value chain by different means. Hon. Members who were local authority councillors for any long period may remember that there was a particular passage of time when many estates and other places were plagued with burnt-out cars. People had decided that their car had no value because it was an old banger or had broken down, and that the easiest thing to do was to go and dump it somewhere and/or burn it.

That was substantially resolved by the end-of-life vehicles directive and the beginnings of the idea that even an old banger had some value for recycling purposes. The person who might otherwise have put that car into a hedge or burnt it in a car park would be incentivised to drive it on its last lap—or push it if it did not work—down to the breaker’s yard, where they would get a couple of hundred pounds for it, because it had increased value that way.

In the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive, we have a sort-of attempt to give that value to white goods and various large items. The producer responsibility elements of WEEE required that the producer have a responsibility to get those products back. The process is very indirect. At the end of the life of a particular product, the producer is not necessarily in the same state as when the product was first produced, so you may have orphan products that require producer responsibility but are without a producer responsible for them. That producer responsibility is also a mediated process because someone else has to collect the product and establish what the responsibility should be.

Ruth Jones: Again, my hon. Friend is making a powerful and practical point. When ordering a new washing machine or dishwasher, for example, people have to pay if they want the person coming to fit the new one to take the old one away. That is almost a disincentive to recycle and reuse things. It is similar with mattresses. Does he agree that mattresses are the bane of local councils' lives? They are dumped on the side of the road. We should make sure that they are recycled properly.

Dr Whitehead: My hon. Friend raises the issue of mattresses, which absolutely are the most difficult thing to properly dispose of. I was going to restrict my point to white goods, but it is absolutely true of mattresses. Even with better regulations in place than previously, we still find substantial fly-tipping, quite often of mattresses, old furniture and white goods—old fridges or whatever. It is not so much the fridges and white goods that could have been taken away when a new item is purchased. If that item has a second life and is reused after it has been taken away, at the end of its life it has no value, and we are lucky if it goes down to the council tip or whatever and back into the producer responsibility cycle.

We still have a considerable problem with fly-tipping of these particular products. One way to deal with that would be to give those items a residual value, like the pop bottles. There is no reason whatever why any hon. Member should remember this, but I put forward a ten-minute rule Bill, in about 2001, I think, to introduce a deposit scheme for white goods. That would have meant that, for a small additional outlay, the product would throughout its life have a value attached to it, even when not being used. It would be a tiny proportion of the original cost of the white good—let us say a refrigerator—and as that reduced in value over time, the proportion of the value represented by the deposit would increase. Therefore, by the end of that particular product's life, even if it had gone through several owners, it would have a value attached to it, which might well impel someone to turn it in rather than put it in a hedge. That is the same principle as the value that was added to vehicles at the end of life.

I am not clear about whether the regulations in schedule 8 are actually generic, or whether they will actually enable that sort of thing to happen in addition to the things that we normally talk about, such as the easier recycling of small items. I think the Minister will agree that it is not just about littering, it is about these large items. We could do the same thing with mattresses. We could require a deposit on a mattress, and provided someone had a certification of the deposit, they could receive the value of the mattress at the end of its life. Mattresses actually have quite long lives in various iterations. Does the Minister think that these regulations could accommodate that sort of arrangement? Although she has said that these regulations should be targeted, does she consider that in the fullness of time, perhaps they could be expanded in ambition and scope to accommodate those sorts of arrangements for the future? Does she think that within the schedule as it stands, regulations can be made that allow that to happen, or does she consider that further work may be necessary to bring it about?

Rebecca Pow: I thank the hon. Member for his comments. I am pleased he raised those points, because it gives me a chance to expand a bit on a genuinely interesting

subject by which most of the population are fascinated. As has been mentioned, people do want the schemes. In fact, I am old enough to remember those glass Tizer bottles that could be taken back.

To reiterate, we are talking about schedule 8, which deals with deposit return schemes and the issue of how many plastic drinks bottles we use—14 billion a year, as well as 9 billion cans and 5 billion glass bottles. A lot of them are recycled, but it is still only 65%, so we have a long way to go. That is why the schemes will be important.

We have had a consultation and we are in the process of developing proposals using further evidence and ongoing stakeholder engagement, which is important because we have to involve the industry and local authorities—all the people involved in that whole space. The final scope and model of the schemes for drinks containers, including whether it is all-in or on-the-go, will be presented in a second consultation. We are considering cans and plastic and glass bottles.

In the previous consultation, we also consulted on coffee cups, cartons and pouches, which are one of my bugbears. We seem to be forced to buy our cat food in pouches whereas most of it used to be in tins, which I can hardly find now. That is an interesting subject that we need to go into at some point.

The opportunity will be provided by the schedule, which sets out the framework for deposit return schemes, including what items would be subject to a deposit return scheme, how the deposit amount is set, the requirements that can be placed on scheme participants, and the enforcement requirements under a deposit return scheme. The crucial thing is that a scheme has to be well functioning to make it easy for consumers to use. That is incredibly important, otherwise they will not use it and it will not work.

Ruth Jones: The Minister raises an interesting point about cat food pouches that I will take away. Obviously it is importantly to address those things, so can she outline the timescale for that?

Rebecca Pow: I was going on to say, touching on the important point made by the hon. Member for Southampton, Test, that the powers will allow us and future Governments to introduce deposit return schemes for other items in future. That is the purpose of them, so they can be expanded in scope, exactly as he hopes. He makes a good point on those grounds.

For example, those schemes could be for batteries, electrical and electronic equipment, and bulky items, including mattresses. The point about mattresses is absolutely right. My family are farmers and they find many mattresses dumped in their gateways on the outskirts of Bath. I know other Committee members' families are involved in recycling and waste, and they could probably tell similar stories. The schedule will give us that opportunity.

The schemes will work hand in hand with the extended producer responsibility schemes, which will also help to reduce the amount of waste being dumped. Takeaway cups are classed as packaging, so they will come under the extended producer responsibility schemes for packaging. We are committed, as I think I said on a previous day, to consulting on EPR for textiles and bulky household items, so mattresses could come under that category of extended producer responsibility. Thus, exactly as I think the hon. Member was suggesting, it will all be

factored into the costs of the mattress, but the manufacturer will have to abide by the EPR system for the mattresses. Other items that we have committed to consulting on for that EPR scheme are construction materials, tyres and fishing gear, so they should all work together.

12.45 pm

However, this power relating to deposit schemes will enable other items to be included where it is considered necessary to promote reuse and recycling, where they are difficult to manage at the end of life and are frequently fly-tipped or dumped. I hope that has given a bit more detail.

Question put and agreed to.

Schedule 8, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Clause 52 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 9

CHARGES FOR SINGLE USE PLASTIC ITEMS

Ruth Jones: I beg to move amendment 21 to schedule 9, page 174, line 28, leave out “may” and insert “must”.

This amendment is another case of “may” and “must”; at the risk of harping on about these things, it is important that we get our language correct. For the benefit of colleagues, I refer them to page 174, line 28 of the Bill, where we want to leave out “may” and insert the word “must”. The reason is that we want Ministers to take to keep their promises and be honest and bold in their promises. Once again, we are looking to strengthen the Bill and make it fit for purpose, and that is why I am asking the Minister to accept this objective and balanced amendment.

This schedule allows for the making of regulations about charges for single-use plastic items. These charges, which we have seen right across the country, with a charge on plastic bags in supermarkets and large stores such as John Lewis and the Link, aim to deliver a reduction in the consumption of single-use plastic items. Our amendment follows on from many others tabled to this Bill and moved in Committee. It is about delivery, it is about action and it is about getting this right.

Rebecca Pow: I thank the hon. Member for her amendment. However, it is appropriate to provide the relevant national authority with flexibility regarding when and how this provision relating to littered plastics is given effect. We have seen similar amendments across the Bill, balancing powers, what “may” be done, with duties or what “must” be done. This amendment is no different.

It will not be appropriate for this power to be exercised in all circumstances: for instance, our extended producer responsibility reforms to the packaging waste regulations should make significant strides towards addressing unnecessary plastic waste in packaging. Adding an additional charge would be unnecessary and unfair to those producers, as they would face an overlap of multiple charges and fees. To avoid that, we must take care when deciding which policy instrument to use in order to bring about the most effective change.

We need to take a measured approach and introduce the charge for items where there is a clear, considered and evidenced need for us to intervene. Imposing a duty

for the Government to do so without thorough investigation into which products we should charge for could, for instance, lead to the unintended consequences of driving the market away from a single-use plastic product because a suitable alternative is available. That could risk causing even more serious effects, such as increasing greenhouse gas emissions through poor material switches.

The UK is consistently and rightly seen as a world leader in the area of tackling plastic pollution. I recently met a group called Oceana, a global organisation, thinking we were going to pick up lots of tips from them about how they are dealing with it, but they said, “Oh, no, we are watching you, Minister!” That was interesting—we are very much being watched on what measures we are putting in place.

We want to continue to lead by example to ensure that we reduce the plastic pollution entering the environment in the right way to prevent greater issues further down the line. This power will allow us and the devolved Governments of Wales and Northern Ireland to intervene as and when there is a clear need for change. I therefore ask the hon. Lady whether she might withdraw her amendment.

Ruth Jones: I thank the Minister for her explanation. It is always helpful to hear her expand on matters. It is also good to hear that, yes, the Government are being scrutinised by non-governmental organisations out there. It is good to see that they are being held accountable by such people, who are, let us be honest, the watchdogs. They, too, want to ensure that we have action.

The argument about flexibility—that the danger with too much flexibility is that we cannot actually achieve anything—has been made many times, so I will not repeat it, but I am happy to hear about the progress being made in moving matters forward. Again, I press the Minister on timescales. If we are to consult, then how long for and when will action come through? However, I am sure we will discuss that later. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Ruth Jones: I beg to move amendment 182 in schedule 9, page 174, line 32, leave out paragraph 1(2)(b) and insert—

“(b) are made of plastic or any other single use material, and”.

The schedule seeks to reduce the consumption of single-use plastic by allowing charges to be imposed. However, the provision for charges to apply only to single-use plastics risks merely shifting the environmental burden, as alternative materials may be used with equal environmental recklessness. The risks of material substitution are plentiful and well documented by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, chaired by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), a Conservative Member. They have also been covered in comprehensive reports from Greenpeace and the Green Alliance, and I thank both organisations for their work on this important area.

The deeper problem lies with the single-use, throwaway culture, not with plastic per se. We need to look at changing hearts and minds, as well as legislation. I am well aware that during the pandemic our progress on getting rid of single-use plastics has been set back, but I hope the Minister will take this serious and urgent issue forward.

[Ruth Jones]

To take fly-tipping, for example, one north London borough—I am sure that this is similar elsewhere—spends millions on collecting fly-tipping, because it has an obligation to keep streets clean, and residents complain when it does not. I am sure all hon. Members in the Committee have similar stories about the amounts their local councils have to fork out to ensure that their streets are kept clear of litter and fly-tipping.

It is not the council dumping mattresses, furniture, unwanted goods and so on; it is residents, businesses and the like, and we had a discussion about that, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test. To tackle the problem, therefore, we need to get it into people's heads that enough is enough. It is simply not acceptable to attack, damage and contaminate our environment like that. Similarly, with this amendment, we want to tackle the throwaway culture once and for all, and we can use the Bill to do just that.

The amendment would address that increasing challenge. We need to ensure that charges are possible for all single-use materials, not just the plastic ones. In simpler terms, our amendment would ensure that the Government can successfully tackle our throwaway culture at the same time as tackling plastic pollution. Treating plastic in a policy vacuum is a short-sighted approach that risks changes that could, for example, increase carbon emissions or result in more waste generation.

The amendment follows on from many others tabled to the Bill and moved in Committee. It is all about delivery, action and getting the Bill right.

Rebecca Pow: I appreciate the focus on this issue. However, I fear that the amendment has not taken enough account of the bespoke issue of plastics or of how much of the Bill is aimed at tackling our single-use culture. Applying charges to single-use plastic items will be an effective way of reducing the impact on the natural world. The measures are designed to focus specifically on single-use, hard-to-recycle plastics.

In 2019, the Marine Conservation Society recorded that, on average, per 100 metres of beach, more than 150 pieces of plastic were found, which is a shocking revelation. That is more than triple the second most commonly listed item, which is cigarette stubs, which also contain plastic. I do not know whether hon. Members have been to the Keep Britain Tidy events, but that organisation has a big drive on cigarette butts at the moment. They contain a horrifying amount of plastic, not to mention the other toxic chemicals.

The MCS's work showcases the prevalence of plastics in our environment and explains why this material needs a focused clause in the Bill. As we saw with our ban on plastic straws, plastics still have an important role to play in certain applications, but Government intervention is necessary to tackle unnecessary plastic. Many of our mailbags are full of messages about these items. Public opinion was demonstrated in HMT's call for evidence on tackling the plastic problem in March 2018, which received an incredible 162,000 responses, with strong support for the use of taxes and charges to tackle single-use plastic waste.

A lot is already being done on single-use plastics. Great work is being done on microbeads and microplastics, which the hon. Member for Cambridge referred to.

When I was a Back Bencher, I asked the Speaker whether he had had a shower that morning, with the intention to point out how many microbeads were in the shower gel that would have been used. We have brought in one of the toughest bans in the world. There is also the 5p single-use carrier bag charge, which has had a dramatic impact on the number of bags used. A lot of good work has already been done.

The Bill already provides a robust approach towards achieving a more circular economy. Our new powers to reform the packaging waste regulations will enable us to adapt the system to incentivise all packaging, not just plastic, to be more carefully designed and manufactured, with recyclability in mind. The eco-design measures and consumer information powers will enable regulations to be made that set basic standards with sustainability in mind and that require information provision to consumers, to drive the market towards products that are designed to last longer, perhaps through multiple uses, instead of being thrown away after first use. The House of Commons shop is selling some excellent cutlery packs, which are made of bamboo. My hon. Friends and hon. Members should all carry a pack in their pockets or bags, to cut down on single-use items.

Meanwhile, our powers to enable the implementation of a deposit return scheme and introduce consistency in household and business recycling collections will drive the capture of more material and all types of single-use items for recycling.

Dr Whitehead *rose*—

Rebecca Pow: I will give way quickly, before I wind up.

Dr Whitehead: I am slightly concerned that the Minister is not responding to exactly what we said in the amendment. We need to make a decision on what this is about. Is it about single-use items, or is it about plastic items? In this instance, the two have been elided for the purpose of a concentration on plastic single-use items.

Schedule 9 defines single-use items in paragraph 1(3). It does not define them as a plastic single-use item, but simply as a "single use item". The schedule enables the Government to make specific regulations. Indeed, the regulations "may specify"—that is the correct use of a "may"—single-use items, but only those that "are made wholly or partly of plastic", which narrows down the range of single-use items.

The Chair: Order. I think the hon. Gentleman has made his points—[*Interruption.*] I cannot bring in any other Members until the Minister has resumed.

Rebecca Pow: I was literally on my last paragraph. The ability to place a charge on single-use plastic items will be a powerful tool in our efforts to tackle the issues arising from our use of single-use plastic, while still allowing for their continued use by people who need them. I therefore ask the hon. Member for Newport West to withdraw the amendment.

Ruth Jones: Again, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test has said, we are not talking about plastics; we are talking about single-use items.

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): There is a specific issue in terms of plastic and why there is a need to focus on it: it is not biodegradable. It stays permanently in the oceans and is often very difficult to recycle. That is why there are so many tonnes of plastic floating around in the oceans, but not tonnes of other materials. We cannot start saying, “We’ve got to clamp down on everything that is single use.”

I suspect that the hon. Lady tends to buy *The Guardian*, which she uses only once. Would she put a special charge on buying all paper that is single use? Pieces of paper are single use, as are many other products. The trouble is that if we introduce charges on them, we actually discourage companies from moving from something like plastic, which is environmentally damaging, to something that is more sustainable. For example, I am a subscriber to *The Times* newspaper. It used to come wrapped in single-use plastic, which was terrible. It now comes wrapped in something that is completely biodegradable, which can be put in the compost. If we introduce charges, we discourage companies from doing stuff that is more environmentally sustainable.

Ruth Jones: I am disturbed to hear that the hon. Member does not recycle *The Guardian*, because that is what we are doing.

Anthony Browne: I do. Well, I do not subscribe to *The Guardian*, but I recycle *The Times*.

The Chair: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his intervention. He cannot continue to make interventions from a sedentary position.

Ruth Jones: Thank you, Sir George. I am sure we can continue this debate at length at a later date.

I would suggest that we recycle everything that can be recycled, but the important thing is that we do not take our eye off the ball by talking just about plastics. The danger is that by talking just about plastics, we limit ourselves to being able to control only single-use plastic with this legislation in the future. Two years down the line, the problem might be some other material that is single use. Again, we have a problem with the definition of single use. As my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test said, the issue is the single-use sickness of it, rather than the actual product itself. That is why we think the amendment is so important, and we will push it to a Division.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 8.

Division No. 27]

AYES

Furniss, Gill
Jones, Ruth

Whitehead, Dr Alan
Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Afolami, Bim
Bhatti, Saqib
Browne, Anthony
Docherty, Leo

Graham, Richard
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Moore, Robbie
Pow, Rebecca

Question accordingly negatived.

1.4 pm

The Chair adjourned the Committee without Question put (Standing Order No.88).

Adjourned till this day at Two o'clock.

